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SUBJECT: DISENGAGEMENT SITUATION REPORT, AUGUST 19, 2005

REF: TEL AVIV 5132

This is a joint message from Embassy Tel Aviv and Consulate General Jerusalem.

This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

This message conveys information as of 1700 hours local time.

11. (SBU) Summary: On the fifth day of disengagement, IDF soldiers and police focused on evacuating the settlement of Gadid. At the beginning of the day, ten families and over 300 infiltrators remained, but the evacuation was complete by around 1500 hours. The GOI also began demolishing homes in Kerem Atzmona outpost. The security forces do not plan to evacuate any settlements on Saturday, August 20. A Katyusha rocket fired from Jordan landed near Eilat Airport around 0845 hours on August 19, causing minor material damage, according to Israeli press reports. In addition, two rockets were fired at U.S. Navy vessels in Jordan's Aqaba port across the border from Eilat. The French journalist who was kidnapped on August 15 is still missing. End Summary.

12. (SBU) SETTLER EVACUATION STATUS

-- At the end of the fourth day of evacuations yesterday evening, Major General Dan Harel told the press that only about a quarter of the Gaza Strip settlers remain to be evacuated. Press reports indicated that the IDF and Israeli Police had succeeded in clearing out all of the infiltrators and settlement residents from Neve Dekalim, Kfar Darom, Kfar Yam, and Gan Or by 2200 hours, although a few families remain in Neve Dekalim and Kfar Darom who will leave voluntarily in the coming days. The most significant resistance took place in Kfar Darom, where disengagement opponents sprayed a mixture of paint thinner and other chemicals on ten policemen. In total, 75 people were injured during the operation, and up to 1,000 people may have been arrested.

-- Today, August 19, the IDF and Israeli Police focused on evacuating Gadid. Although only ten families remained in the settlement at the beginning of the day, press reports indicated that over 300 infiltrators were barricaded in the synagogue and on the roofs of some houses. The opponents threw eggs, roof tiles, and rocks at the security forces, poured oil, and burned tires, but most were evacuated about approximately 1230 hours. Gunshots were heard after the evacuation of the synagogue, but no one was injured. One teenager fell off a roof after slipping on oil, and was taken to Soroka Hospital in Beer Sheva.

-- A group of six or seven Israeli youths vandalized a Palestinian-owned gas station at the entrance of the Sa Nur settlement in the northern West Bank. They poured fuel on the floor and caused extensive damage to the buildings and offices, according to press. The police arrived before they could set the gas station on fire.

-- Press reports today indicated that home demolitions in Kerem Atzmona began today, which was earlier than expected, as previous reports said the demolitions would not begin until Sunday, August 21. Homes are still expected to be demolished on Sunday in Peat Sadeh and Rafah Yam, and agricultural equipment from Gush Katif will be removed. Gabi Golan of the Prime Minister's Office told EconCouns on August 18 that the homes in Gan Or and possibly Dugit would also be demolished on Sunday.

-- According to Voice of Israel, the evacuations of Sa Nur and Homesh will take place next week.

13. (SBU) STATUS OF INDIVIDUAL SETTLEMENTS

The following is an outline of the evacuation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank settlements as of 1700, August 19, according to IDF reports and Israeli media.

Atzmona: Press reports indicate that approximately 80 families remain. The settlement will be evacuated either Sunday or Monday, August 21 or 22.

Kerem Atzmona (outpost): 100 percent evacuated on Wednesday, August 17.

Bedolah: 100 percent evacuated on Wednesday, August 17.

Dugit: 100 percent evacuated on Tuesday, August 16.

Ele Sinai: Press reports indicate that 30 families, or about 220 people, remain in the settlement. Gaby Golan of the Prime Minister's Office told EconCouns yesterday that the families have secured permits to stay until Monday, August 22. Gadid: Although the settlement was supposed to have been completely evacuated on Wednesday, August 17, security forces were present today to continue the evacuation of the ten families and hundreds of infiltrators remaining. Several families left voluntarily at approximately 1000 hours, and the evacuation was complete at approximately 1500 hours.

Gan Or: 100 percent evacuated on Thursday, August 18.

Ganei Tal: 100 percent evacuated on Wednesday, August 17.

Kfar Darom: Despite press reports that the settlement was completely evacuated on Thursday, August 18, other reports this morning indicated that a few families remained who planned to depart voluntarily today.

Kfar Yam: 100 percent evacuated on Thursday, August 18.

Morag: 100 percent evacuated on Wednesday, August 17.

Netzarim: All of the estimated 64 families in the settlement had earlier agreed with the IDF to leave voluntarily by Monday, August 22. Press reports this morning indicated, however, that the settlers are still negotiating whether to depart voluntarily, and that the IDF may evacuate them on Sunday, August 21, instead.

Netzer Hazani: 100 percent evacuated on Thursday, August 18.

Neve Dekalim: Despite press reports that the settlement was completely evacuated on Thursday, August 18, other reports this morning indicated that a few families remained who would leave voluntarily in the coming days.

Nissanit: 100 percent evacuated on Thursday, August 18.

Peat Sadeh: 100 percent evacuated on Tuesday, August 16.

Qatif: Press reported today that the 61 families remaining will be evacuated by Sunday or Monday, August 21 or 22.

Rafah Yam: 100 percent evacuated on Tuesday, August 16.

Shelo/Shalev: 100 percent evacuated on Tuesday, August 16.

Tel Qatifah: 100 percent evacuated on Wednesday, August 17.

West Bank Settlements:

Gannim: 100 percent evacuated on Tuesday, August 16.

Homesh: Evacuations will take place next week.

Kaddim: 100 percent evacuated on Tuesday, August 16.

Sa Nur: According to Voice of Israel, the security forces are concerned about the number of infiltrators that have been arriving to the settlement since the disengagement began. The defense establishment is reportedly concerned that the settlers in Sa Nur may use weapons against the police and IDF.

14. (SBU) SECURITY SITUATION

-- Rocket attacks hit Eilat and Aqaba: A Katyusha rocket fired from Jordan landed near Eilat Airport around 0845 hours on August 19, causing minor material damage, according to Israeli press reports. At about the same time, two rockets were fired at U.S. Navy vessels in Jordan's Aqaba port across the border from Eilat. One of the rockets hit a Jordanian Army warehouse, killing one Jordanian soldier and injuring another, according to regional press reports. Israeli radio reported that Jordanian security forces located the rocket launcher on the roof of a house in Aqaba and are now searching for two Iraqis and a Syrian who had rented the house.

-- Shootings: Palestinian militants fired in the direction of Gadid settlement mid-day August 19, according to Palestinian sources. IDF reported shootings targeting IDF outposts near Neve Dekalim, Netzarim, Khan Yunis, and Rafah. IDF forces initiated fire late on August 18 near the Erez crossing, injuring one a 20-year-old Palestinian man.

-- Kidnapping: French Channel 3 journalist Mohammad Luoati, seized by gunmen on August 15, is still being held August 18. There is no news as to his whereabouts.

-- Rocket/Mortar Attacks: The IDF reported that a Kassam rocket was fired late August 18 about one kilometer south of Kissufim crossing. Two mortar shells struck near Ganei Tal settlement, according the IDF. Palestinian source asserted that rocket/mortar attacks were also directed against Netzarim and Morag, with one IDF soldier lightly injured in the Netzarim attack.

-- Attack Denied: Military commander in the Al-Quds Brigades, Abu-Hamzah, denied Israeli (IDF) reports that a four-member Islamic Jihad cell had been planning to attack Israeli settlements. Abu-Hamzeh asserted that Islamic Jihad and its military wing Al-Quds Brigades remain committed to the current calm, as agreed in Cairo, and denied any connection to the arrested members of the alleged cell.

-- Israeli-Palestinian Security Meeting: Major General Jamal Abu-Zayd, head of the PA Ministry of Interior's Strategic Planning team, and Major general Yitzhaq Har'el, head of the Israeli Army's Planning Branch, met late on August 18 at Bayt Hanun Crossing. A positive atmosphere prevailed, according to PA media sources, and both sides agreed to hold another meeting next week.

15. (SBU) PALESTINIAN REACTIONS

-- Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs Nasser Al-Kidwa said on August 19 that Israel is portraying its disengagement plan as a "painful concession" which will never be repeated. "Israel wants to make the pullout out from the Gaza Strip and four settlements in the West Bank appear as a great achievement, costly and painful concession," Al-Kidwa told the Cairo-based Middle East News Agency. He warned that Israeli control of the Gaza airspace, sea and crossing points after the withdrawal could turn the strip into a huge prison.

On Egypt's role, Al-Kidwa said, "I would like further to thank Egyptian officers who are training Palestinian troops to take over after the Israeli pullout from the Gaza Strip." He added that the Rafah crossing point should be run by the Egyptians and the Palestinians alone.

-- A Palestinian NGO director told emboff that the atmosphere in Gaza is relatively calm, with lots of flag-waving and music on the streets. The contact said he anticipates that it will be difficult for Palestinian security forces to prevent Palestinians from entering evacuated settlement areas where they once had lands, or to prevent Hamas and PIJ from claiming to have liberated these areas. Post-disengagement, Palestinians expect greater freedom of movement and international travel, which has been restricted, particularly for men in the 16-35 age cohort. The word on the street is that the PA is trying to find a way for a third party (i.e. EU or U.S.) to play a role at Rafah without any Israeli involvement. Palestinians "want to feel that Gaza is like a liberated area. Why would they travel to Israel (i.e., Kerem Shalom) to go to Egypt or Jordan?"

16. (SBU) GOI POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

-- The Israeli cabinet will meet on Sunday, August 21. No agenda has been published, which is the norm, but Israeli radio reports that the Cabinet is expected to vote to approve the last two evacuation orders for the settlements in the northern Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank. MOD Mofaz is expected to brief Israeli ministers on the disengagement process and the general security situation.

-- Knesset Member Netanyahu told the press August 19 that Friday's rocket attack on Eilat should be viewed as a serious warning ahead of the missiles that would be launched on Israeli cities in a year or two from Islamic terror bases in Gaza and the West Bank.

17. (SBU) BORDER CROSSINGS/HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

-- Erez Crossing and Industrial Zone: According to Gaza private sector contacts, Erez remains officially closed to Palestinians, but the IDF continues to allow a small number of people to pass based on humanitarian/medical grounds with prior coordination.

-- Rafah Terminal: According to UNRWA, Rafah remains open in both directions.

-- Abu Khali junction: Re-opened at 2350 hours August 19 and closed 0500 hours as scheduled.

-- Karni Terminal: Karni remains open on August 19. -- Kissufim, the main crossing used to enter Gush Katif and Kfar Darom settlements, remains open only to traffic/persons leaving Gaza.

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